

A Lexical Approach to Task-based Language Learning

Jane Willis

Aston University, UK

Lesson planning – exploiting a text, written or spoken

1. **Choose your text** – written or spoken. (e.g. a transcript of a task recording or an interview). Identify and list the key topic words / phrases that learners need to know in advance. Plan a Pre-task phase (e.g. brainstorm, classify the list).
2. **Design a task or two** which will encourage learners to process it for meanings while they read or listen. Allow time for the learners to do the task, plan and reports their results to the class (i.e. spontaneous and planned talk / writing.)
3. **Exploit the text for useful words and lexical phrases**, classify and build on / extend from these, adding other examples with similar patterns from texts learners are familiar with, or from learners' dictionary entries.
4. **Design language-focused activities** to help learners notice, systematise and remember them.

Identify useful language: starting point 1 – lexical phrases & collocations

- **related to the main theme or topic**. Classify these structurally, e.g. noun + noun, verb + noun, verb + preposition / particle etc.
- **expressing notions** e.g. time, quantity, location) and **functions**, e.g. agreeing, warning, evaluating, and classify these to highlight typical patternings.
- **of an interpersonal nature** e.g. vague language, clarifying, checking, reacting.
- **expressing textual relations and signalling** e.g. contrast, emphasis, addition.

Starting point 2 – common words and pattern grammar

- **very common words** e.g. *as, be, that, way*
- **prepositions** e.g. *about, in, on, up* and their meaning patterns
- **unspecific words** e.g. *in terms of, the nature of, in the sense of, in the case of*
- **parts of words** e.g. *-ing -ed, -ly*
- **other common words that occur a few times in the text** e.g. *more* as in *more or less, much more, far more*, or *whole* as in *a whole range of, the whole business of*

Task-based lesson framework – from meaning to form

Priming & Preparation

Exploring topic, highlighting words & phrases

Task Cycle

Task(s) >> Planning >> Report

Form focus

Analysis and Practice

Text

The boy who came out from the cold.

A schoolboy who spent the night trapped in a butcher's cold store after being locked in accidentally, ran on the spot for ten hours to stay alive.

Peter Emerson, aged 15, was locked in the store in a Stratford-upon Avon butcher's shop for 14 hours with the temperature around freezing point.

Staff arriving for work at the Wood Street shop found him yesterday morning with his teeth chattering and his face purple with cold. Still freezing, Peter immediately telephoned his parents, who had reported him missing to the police.

Peter, who lives in Banbury Road, Stratford, said: "I help out at the shop after school and I had gone into the cold store just before closing time. I was behind a big food shelf when the door locked behind me.

"At first I thought it was someone playing a joke but when I realised it wasn't and began shouting all the staff had gone home. I tried to kick the door open and to pick the lock but it was no good.

"I was wearing only a shirt, trousers, a thin pullover and a white butcher's smock. It was bitterly cold and I realised that I might die, so I ran on the spot for about ten of the 14 hours".

The Guardian newspaper

References and further reading

- Edwards, C. and J. Willis (eds) 2005. *Teachers Exploring Tasks in ELT*. Palgrave MacMillan. British Council ELT Innovations Award 2006
- Laufer, B. and J. Hulstijn Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language: the construct of task-induced involvement. *Applied Linguistics*, Mar 2001; 22: 1 - 26.
- Leaver B. and J. R. Willis 2004 *Task-based Instruction in FLE: practices and programs* Georgetown University Press
- Nation, I.S.P. *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language* Cambridge University Press
- Liria, P. (ed) 2009 *L'approche actionnelle dans l'enseignement des langues* SBL
- Willis, D. 2003. *Rules, Patterns and Words: Grammar and Lexis in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press
- Willis, D. and J. Willis, 2007 *Doing Task-based Teaching* Oxford University Press
- Willis, D. and J. Willis (forthcoming) Corpus analysis for a lexical syllabus in *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* Wiley Blackwell
- Willis, J 2010 Concordances in the classroom: a D.I.Y. approach to assembling and exploiting concordances of common words. In Tomlinson (ed) *Materials Development in Language Teaching* New edition

Useful websites

An excellent introductory article on TBL by Richard Frost:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/a-task-based-approach>

Four articles on TBL by Jane Willis can be found at:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/criteria-identifying-tasks-tbl>

Free sample task-based lesson plans at <http://www.willis-elt.co.uk/taskbased.html>